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### Editorial

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For over forty years, the scholarship of B.A. Gerrish, John Nuveen Professor Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Historical Theology at The University of Chicago Divinity School, has been a touchstone for debates in historical theology and Protestant thought. Throughout his career, he has been both a careful exegete of texts and thinkers on their own terms and a clear guide to the nuances, shifts and changes in theological debates across the centuries. In the introduction to his *The Old Protestantism and the New*, Gerrish argued that Protestant ideas are “pluralistic and transient” and must be placed in a “wider setting” beyond a sole focus on Luther or Calvin.<sup>1</sup> In an era of increasing specialisation and compartmentalization, Gerrish has exemplified this approach by covering a range of Protestant thinkers and movements—from key monographs on both the German and Swiss Reformations to landmark contributions to the study of modern thinkers like Schleiermacher and Troeltsch. Take, for instance his insights into the Eucharistic structure of Calvin’s thinking in *Grace and Gratitude*, or his arguments that challenge longstanding Barthian and Brunnerian suspicions of Schleiermacher by illustrating the fundamental Christian and Reformed shape of Schleiermacher’s dogmatic thought. Whether or not one agrees with Gerrish’s conclusions, to read him is to encounter these Protestant ideas and figures afresh.

With the publication of *Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline*, Gerrish has offered a dogmatic coda to a lifetime’s work in historical theology. In the shift to a one-volume dogmatics, Gerrish does not understand his work to be moving away from historical theology as such. Following Schleiermacher’s own definitions of the theological curriculum, Gerrish locates dogmatics as a branch historical theology, even as it is distinct from church history. Dogmatic theology, while oriented to the living community and its faith, must also be in ongoing conversation with the past. As Gerrish writes, “The past is pregnant with the future, and the present is the issue of the past, the dividing line is little more than a pragmatic convenience.”<sup>2</sup>

We might ask, then, what is the relationship between the careful work of historical theology that has marked Gerrish’s career and his own later turn toward dogmatic theology? To answer this question goes beyond a consideration of Gerrish’s career alone and into broader concerns regarding what it means to think with and after a tradition of theological inquiry. This is a particularly acute question for those of us—like Gerrish, myself, and two of the three participants in this book symposium, Bruce McCormack and Martha Moore-Keish—who count ourselves as part of the Protestant Reformed tradition. What does it mean to write dogmatic theology in conversation with a tradition that is marked by a commitment to be reformed and ever reforming in light of the Word of God?

These are long-standing questions in Reformed theology, but one that Gerrish’s work makes all the more pressing in his careful and refreshingly clear definition of the task and norms of dogmatic theology in the modern world. According to Gerrish the task of dogmatic theology is twofold: to seek to understand the Christian faith and to test the adequacy by which Christian faith is expressed. This delineation of the dogmatic tasks is deeply traditionally and clearly resonates with Anselm, Calvin, and the Reformed Scholastics. And yet, Gerrish understands the demands of dogmatic theology to entail serious engagement with the modern world, including post-Kantian philosophy, the natural sciences, and historical criticism of the Bible. As he notes, “The most urgent need for change has been found not in the corruption of the tradition by the infidelity of the church, but rather in the estrangement of the church’s traditions from the mental habits of the modern world. The problem is no longer ‘Scripture and tradition’ but *tradition* (including Scripture) and *modern world*.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> B.A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (New York: Continuum Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>3</sup> B.A. Gerrish, *Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 21-22.

The intellectual challenges of the modern world, then, would appear to undercut or at the very least destabilize the traditional norm of Protestant theological reform - Scripture. Gerrish recognizes this challenge and makes a theological claim that distinguishes his thought from the pre-modern Protestant tradition and places him squarely within the modern liberal tradition. Tradition and Scripture must be held together as the primary norm of theology. "We may hold Scripture and tradition together, then, by taking our primary norm *Christian tradition which interprets the Apostolic witness to Jesus Christ*."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the secondary and alien norm of dogmatic theology becomes "*present-day thought and experience, insofar as they call for reinterpreting the tradition*."<sup>5</sup> Analogous to how classical Protestantism claims that Scripture is the primary norm of theology, with the tradition and confessions as secondary norms of interpretation, Gerrish contends that the apostolic witness is the primary norm of theology and present day thought now serves as the secondary norm that forces re-articulation of dogmatic claims.

By so defining the tasks and norms of theology, Gerrish advocates for a particular posture toward scripture and the theological tradition, one that recognizes both its import and its provisional character. As he makes clear throughout his scholarship, the tradition should not be reduced to a "fixed and static quantity."<sup>6</sup> The various classical constructions of theology—be it in scriptural witness, early Christian thinkers, the conciliar councils, the Scholastics, Reformers, or modern thinkers cannot be simply invoked without change for a new historical situation. Invoking the Chalcedonian formula may (or may not) be a necessary part of thinking about God's redemptive activity in Jesus of Nazareth, but it alone is not sufficient. "The task of dogmatic theology is misconstrued when it is thought to be simply a matter of learning and accepting whatever the church teaches. That would be indoctrination, not dogmatics."<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the tradition of theological and scriptural inquiry is embedded within and has so shaped the current articulation of faith that it can never be jettisoned. Appeals to tradition entail something of a recognition of their historical particularity and variability as well as an honest intellectual wrestling with their ongoing power in shaping faith and its articulation today.

Gerrish's own relationship to the two thinkers that figure prominently throughout his *Christian Faith*, Calvin and Schleiermacher, is thus never mere repetition. Gerrish's volume is not updating either Calvin's 16<sup>th</sup> Century *Institutes* or Schleiermacher's early 19<sup>th</sup> century *Glaubenslehre* for the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rather, Gerrish offers a careful and critical engagement with Scripture and the tradition, particularly Calvin and Schleiermacher, in order to think afresh about what a dogmatics in outline demands now in light of the various insights of historical studies and the sciences. One need not share Gerrish's commitments to the Reformed tradition or to the priority of Calvin and Schleiermacher to learn much from his model of sympathetic and critical engagement with the riches of the theological past. Gerrish's dogmatic theology offers a fecund example of what it means to think with and after Scripture and past theologians, in a mode that might be termed a Reformed Evangelical Liberal Theology.

Of course, Gerrish's work raises numerous questions about the nature of scriptural authority, the relationship between the norms of modernity, the sciences and dogmatic theology, and the contested legacy of the Reformers and Protestant liberal theology in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, Reformed theologians more influenced by Barth of Bavinck than Schleiermacher might protest Gerrish's understanding of the norms of theology. Liberation

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>6</sup> B.A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 30.

<sup>7</sup> B.A. Gerrish, *Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline*, 19.

theologians will query if Gerrish has placed undue emphasis on modern thought with insufficient attention to the powers of modern politics and economics.

The present book symposium, which are slightly revised papers originally presented in November 2015 for a session of the Reformed Theology and History Group at the American Academic of Religion, aims to stimulate such engagements with Gerrish's work. It offers three critical and appreciative engagements with *Christian Faith* and constructive claims that begin to challenge and extend Gerrish's ideas. Bruce McCormack, Roger Haight and Martha Moore-Keish all note the influence of Gerrish's work on their own thinking, even as they challenge certain frameworks and press them into new arenas. McCormack focuses on the first part of Gerrish's work (Creation) and queries Gerrish's reliance on the structure of Schleiermacher, asking if the organization of moving from faith in God the Creator to faith in God the Redeemer presupposes too much about a generic theism. Haight considers what it means to represent a tradition in the modern world, with particular reference to the first division of the second part of *Christian Faith* (Redemption: Christ and the Christian), and assesses how the deeply Reformed character of Gerrish's thinking might contribute to ecumenical theology. Finally, Moore-Keish's engagement considers the second division of the second part (Redemption: The Spirit and the Church) by interrogating how Gerrish's work might be pressed to engage with contemporary habits of thought around religious plurality and the Trinity.

In all, the forum is a model of careful, critical, generous and constructive engagement, not only with Gerrish's dogmatic theology, but also with the task of writing dogmatic theology in conversation with the theological tradition and the modern world.

- Dr Joshua Ralston